

the state assessment systems. It also rewards schools that score in the top 10 percent on state assessments. The faculty and students at Earl Warren Middle School and Twin Oaks Elementary School have demonstrated strong leadership, clear vision and mission, excellent teaching and curriculum, policies and practices that keep their schools safe for learning, expanded involvement of families, and evidence that both schools help all students achieve high standards.

I am immensely proud of those involved whose outstanding and tireless work in the interest of better education has now been recognized through the National Blue Ribbon Schools program. This is particularly close to my heart, because, as a former teacher and coach, and as a father, one of my passions is improving education so that every American can have a fighting chance to achieve the American Dream.

And while these two schools in my district have now been recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools, the real winners are all of the children, parents, teachers and citizens who have all been challenged through this recognition to successfully improve education in all of their local communities.

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HONORING THE CONTRIBUTIONS  
OF TRUSTEE JUSTIN R.  
RODRIGUEZ OF THE SAN ANTONIO  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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**HON. HENRY CUELLAR**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 14, 2005*

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the exemplary public service of Justin R. Rodriguez, District 7 Trustee of the San Antonio Independent School District.

Justin R. Rodriguez, a long time Texas resident, was born in San Antonio in 1974. In addition to his current career in education, he also has extensive legal experience in both his own law practice and through his former job as Assistant District Attorney.

Mr. Rodriguez understands the needs of our community. As Trustee, his goal is to prepare our children for both higher education and for the future workforce. Setting out to help end teenage pregnancy, and working hard to improve high school graduation rates, Justin Rodriguez believes in our kids.

He is the recipient of numerous awards, most notably the Bruce F. Beilfuss Memorial Award for outstanding service to the University of Wisconsin Law School. Justin R. Rodriguez has also served as the President of the Jefferson Neighborhood Association.

Justin Rodriguez currently lives in San Antonio with his wife Victoria and three children: Miranda, Aidan, and Olivia.

It is an honor to recognize the hard work of Justin R. Rodriguez of the San Antonio Independent School District. His dedication to the education of our children will help to insure the futures of our youngest citizens.

COMMEMORATING THE CITY OF  
MADISON HEIGHTS, MICHIGAN

**HON. SANDER M. LEVIN**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 14, 2005*

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the City of Madison Heights, Michigan, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary of its incorporation as a city.

On January 17, 1955, the residents of the east side of Royal Oak Township voted for the incorporation of the City of Madison Heights and elected nine commissioners to draft a charter for the new city. The Charter Commission drafted its first charter within six months of incorporation. The draft charter was presented to the citizens at a June 6th election and was defeated. A Revised Charter was again presented to the citizens on December 6, 1955, and it was approved, becoming the tenth city government in South Oakland County. At that time, the 7¼ square-mile City was the second largest in South Oakland County. Madison Heights ranked as fifth-highest populated City in South Oakland County. The first City Hall was located at 26305 John R Road, the former township offices. On April 5, 1963, a new municipal building was constructed which is on the present location at 300 West Thirteen Mile Road.

The City of Madison Heights was named a "High Tech Hot Spot" by *Detroit Magazine*. Nestled in the heart of Automation Alley, the newest technology cluster in the United States, Madison Heights offers lifestyle and economic benefits to its residents. There are more than 1,300 commercial and industrial businesses and services within the City and the City is proud to have a majority of small businesses, as well as more than 100 major companies within its borders.

The Madison Heights City motto is "The City of Progress" and it's well deserved. Over 31,000 people call Madison Heights home and enjoy the many benefits of living in a full-service and forward-thinking community. The city leadership has been central to providing growth as well as maintaining a sense of community.

As the city of Madison Heights celebrates this auspicious occasion, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating its citizens as they celebrate the past and focus on the future.

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BLINDNESS DOES NOT PREVENT  
CHRISTIAN PEREZ FROM BECOMING  
SPELLING BEE CHAMPION  
OF IMPERIAL VALLEY!

**HON. BOB FILNER**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 14, 2005*

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor the achievement of Christian Perez, an eighth grade student at Bill E. Young Middle School in Calipatria, a small city in Imperial County, California.

Christian, who is 14, recently participated in the first ever regional Scripps Howard Spelling Bee in Imperial County. As most are aware, the winner of the regional Scripps Howard Spelling Bee moves on to the nationals held

here in Washington, D.C. to face students from across the country.

To prepare for the Spelling Bee, contestants, like Christian, dedicate a large portion of their young lives to the Herculean task of memorizing and learning thousands of words, which in itself is worthy of Congressional recognition.

Despite stiff competition and some very tense moments, Christian won the regional Spelling Bee upon correctly spelling "synapse." The 170 people who were watching the Spelling Bee at the Southwest Performing Arts Theater in El Centro gave Christian a standing ovation.

When asked about the competition, Christian said, "she felt relieved as soon as the competition was over and . . . her only dilemma might be which sister to take to nationals in early June."

Christian's story, however, doesn't end there. Unlike other contestants, who had a wide assortment of dictionaries and word lists to review, Christian's preparation was a little more arduous, as all of her study materials had to be in Braille. Fortunately, Christian did not let lack of sight stand in her way of becoming the spelling champion of Imperial County!

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INTRODUCTION OF THE "VICTIMS  
OF CRIME FAIRNESS ACT"

**HON. ROB SIMMONS**

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 14, 2005*

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of National Victims of Crime Week and to introduce legislation to help crime victims and their families.

The Victims of Crime Act, or VOCA, was a tremendous victory in the fight to aid those affected by crime. It established a trust fund composed of criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalty fees and special assessments collected by the U.S. Attorney's Offices, U.S. Courts and Federal Bureau of Prisons. These dollars come from federal criminals, not from taxpayers.

Money from this fund is used for a variety of services such as crisis intervention, emergency shelter, emergency transportation, counseling, and criminal justice advocacy. There are approximately 4,400 agencies that depend upon VOCA to provide services to 3.6 million crime victims a year. Currently, VOCA is the only federal program that supports services to victims of all types of crimes including homicide fatalities, domestic violence, child abuse, drunk driving, elder financial exploitation, identity theft, rape, and robbery. These services are essential to helping people cope with their victimization and move on with their lives.

Sadly, a spending cap was installed on the VOCA trust fund. In fiscal year 2005, over \$800 million was deposited into the fund. Due to the spending cap, only \$620 million will be distributed to the states this year. While the balance of VOCA sits unused, state crime victim assistance programs struggle to remain fully funded. My legislation, the "Victims of Crime Fairness Act" would eliminate this spending cap and direct the money toward its original intention, helping victims of crime.

My state of Connecticut loses almost \$5 million a year due to the VOCA cap. This money could make all the difference in thousands of people's lives. In a letter to me, Connecticut's State Victim Advocate James Papillo wrote, "The programs funded by the VOCA fund benefit crime victims in Connecticut through direct financial support and crime victim support services. These funds help crime victims when they most need it. Given the substantial reduction in the amount of funds available to the states caused by federal earmarks, and the real need for increased services to crime victims in Connecticut, it is clear that removal of the cap is necessary to ensure that Connecticut will be able to meet the needs of crime victims."

The Victims of Crime Fairness Act is common sense legislation. I ask my colleagues to join me in helping victims of crime by eliminating the VOCA fund spending cap.

#### MILITARY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACT

**HON. ROSA L. DeLAURO**

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Ms. DeLAURO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation which will improve the lives of thousands of our troops and their families. As our troops serve us so well in Iraq, the war on terrorism and on countless other missions around the world, we honor their service. At the same time, however, we should do more to help our troops and their families handle the emotional toll that service can take.

The Military Mental Health Services Improvement Act, which I am introducing with 18 of my colleagues, will improve the ability of servicemembers and their families to access mental health care and overcome the stigma that is too often associated with mental health services. I am especially pleased that the National Military Families Association has lent its support to this important legislation.

Since the beginning of the Iraq War, more than 900 servicemembers have been evacuated from Iraq due to mental health concerns, and a new study by the New England Journal of Medicine confirms that more than one-quarter of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans seeking care at Veterans hospitals are doing so for mental health treatment. While we have made good progress since the Vietnam era in diagnosing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other forms of combat stress, much more remains to be done.

Specifically, my bill will: Ensure that troops deploying to combat theaters get the mental health screening they need before and after deployment. The bill requires that military mental health screenings be done in person. The 1997 Defense Authorization Act required pre- and post-deployment screenings, but the Defense Department elected to use paper self-evaluation forms which are widely viewed as insufficient to identify possible combat-stress cases.

Create a new program designed to alert dependents of servicemembers about the options for and availability of mental health treatment services. The bill requires the DOD to operate a web site and toll-free number that

servicemembers and families can use to get information about the availability of mental health services. Many military families complain of being unable to determine where to go for mental health services. This problem is particularly acute for Guardsmen and Reservists, whose families may not live close to a military installation and thus do not have easy access to a military health care facility.

Reduce the stigma associated with mental health treatment. According to a 2004 New England Journal of Medicine study of troops returning from Iraq, fear of stigmatization was "disproportionately greatest among those most in need of help from mental health services."

Improve coordination between DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs in treating mental health cases. As the youngest veterans, OIF/OEF veterans will be long-term users of VA health services, and so proper diagnosis and treatment are important to reduce their long-term mental health services needs.

Allow recently-deactivated Guard and Reserve members and their families to obtain mental health services through TRICARE for up to 24 months after the servicemember returns. This is a priority for the National Military Families Association, and 24 months was selected because that is the time-frame in which PTSD usually presents itself.

Allow colleges, universities and community hospitals to play a constructive role in helping to diagnose and treat combat stress in our servicemembers by permitting the Defense Department to partner with these organizations to carry out the programs prescribed in the bill.

Mr. Speaker, we owe a debt of gratitude to our troops and their families. Part of this debt can be paid by giving them the resources they need to get through deployment, including combat and long stretches away from loved ones. Supporting this legislation will be a good step in that direction.

I have long been interested in the issue of mental health among our men and women in uniform and their families, but it was brought home for me last year, during the deployment to Iraq of the 439th Quartermaster Company, an Army Reserve unit headquartered in New Haven, Connecticut. Over the course of that deployment, I saw a group of families overwhelmed by the stress and uncertainty caused by the deployment of their loved ones. These families did not know where to turn for help. The situation, unfortunately, did not improve when the soldiers returned from their 19 months on active duty, 14 of which were spent in the Middle East. I would like to read into the RECORD the speech given Monday by the leader of the 439th family support organization, Kelly Beckwith. Kelly's words speak volumes about the emotional toll of deployment on families. I hope my colleagues will take the time to read them:

SPEECH BY KELLY BECKWITH AT THE AMERICAN LEGION POST 89, EAST HAVEN, CONN. ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE DeLAURO MILITARY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2005

"Hello. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Kelly Beckwith. I am the wife of an OEF/OIF Veteran and mother to four young children. My husband, Sgt. Chris Beckwith, served on active duty with the 439th Quartermaster Company from New Haven for over 19 months. I served "unofficially" as the 439th Family Readiness Coordinator during the last few months of their deployment.

"Deployment is an extremely difficult time for our soldiers and their families. While there is a sense of pride in serving your country, the stress of separation can be devastating, even more so when there is no structuralized, formal support system. Reserve support relies heavily upon volunteers, most of which are struggling with the deployment of a loved one themselves. Soldiers are not the only ones making sacrifices. . . .

"If you will allow me to paint you a picture . . . Close your eyes . . .

"Imagine four young, bright-eyed children. Christopher is eight years old and in the third grade. He likes to play with trucks and cars, and loves to build with his legos. Julia is five and just started kindergarten in the fall. She loves to draw and tell stories. Shaun is three years old and very shy and quiet. He just started learning to use the potty. He is loving and holds tightly onto his mom and admires his dad. He wants to be a fireman when he grows up. Olivia just turned two and is eager to learn all that she can and cause mischief of one kind or another.

"Now picture soldiers, dressed in BDUs, filing onto the busses. Picture those same bright-eyed children standing at the gate, with tears in their eyes, hoping to have one last chance to wave goodbye to their Daddy.

"Imagine being the mother of those children, seeing the fear and confusion in their eyes as they know their father has to go away, but they do not understand why or know for how long.

"Imagine losing that one person you had to hold you, to comfort you, to talk to in the middle of the night. Imagine the overwhelming stress as the burden of the household quickly falls on those left behind. Imagine being that wife and realizing that you will now be raising four children on your own. Imagine watching helplessly as the terror of what your loved one is enduring unfolds right before your eyes on the television . . . the sudden onset of anxiety attacks as you wait endlessly for the phone to ring, hoping to hear from him, and dreading when the phone does ring, fearing the worst. Imagine the wife . . . holding tightly onto herself to ease her fears as she cries herself to sleep.

"Those bright-eyed children have all had to grow up entirely too fast.

"The oldest boy, Christopher, assumes the role as father figure to his younger siblings. He no longer wants to go to a friend's house to play. Instead, he prefers to stay home, in case his mother "needs" him. Five year old, Julia, is now six and in the first grade. She pours herself into schoolwork and immerses herself into books. She continues to draw and write. She now keeps a journal in which she writes, "Why can't my Daddy come home?"

"Quiet and shy Shaun, who was once so loveable, is now so full of anger and hate. Because he does not know what words to use to express his feelings, he starts lashing out. He bites, hits, kicks, screams, and breaks anything that catches his eye—three windows, four figurines, and a bed within one week's time. Shaun blames his mother for his father's extended absence and shouts to her "I hate you!" at least three times a day. Then cries, "Mommy, please let my Daddy come home."

"Little Olivia now only knows her father through photographs. When other fathers pick up their children at preschool, Olivia asks, "When is my Daddy coming to get me?"

"Now, if you will, flash forward to over a year and a half later.

\* Christopher is now ten years old and is in the fifth grade.

\* Julia is seven and in second grade.

\* Shaun, who had just started learning to use potty at the beginning of deployment, is now five and in kindergarten.